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ABSTRACT

This study explored issues related to teacher training in China. After a review of the historical and current development of Chinese teacher education, the paper discusses issues related to teacher training for adult education. Results of a survey indicated that teacher training for adult education in China was very inadequate. The system needed a complete training program to train teachers at different levels, not just for subject knowledge, but also for teaching skills. This study also examined issues in teacher training for primary and secondary schools. Survey results indicated that this type of teacher training was also inadequate. Teachers in training receive too little practice teaching and too few current textbooks. Also, methodology was not considered an important course. The political and social status of teachers in China was low, so people did not have much incentive to take up a teaching career. There was little reward for success in teaching, too. The paper presents a list of eight recommendations for changing China's teacher education system. (Contains 10 references.) (SM)

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Current Issues in Teacher Education in China

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CURRENT ISSUES IN TEACHER EDUCATION IN CHINA

Teachers have always had a high standing in Chinese history. Confucius, as an educator and teacher, was venerated as a sage by generations of Chinese people. Yet, despite a long tradition of education in China, the training of teachers is a relatively modern development. It emerged only at the beginning of this century, when the first special teacher training school was established by the government. Since then, a well-developed and hierarchical teacher training system has evolved, though very little has been written about it, either in English or in Chinese. Recently an investigation was carried out in this field, involving the interviewing of twelve people (10 Chinese, 2 British) in which a number of issues were identified. Although the original purpose of this investigation intended to explore issues in teacher training for adults, many issues identified here also apply to teacher training for primary and secondary schools in China. This paper reports these findings, prefaced by a review of the historical and current development of Chinese teacher education.

Historical Development

In old China, education was for the elite class, and teaching was seen to be simply a matter of the transfer of knowledge. Real development in teacher education began after the new China was born in 1949. Wen (1989), a Chinese writer, divides this development into three periods.

The first period, 1949 to 1965, laid the basic foundation for teacher education. This was followed by a period of tortuous development. As in other sectors of education, new policies were devised for the development of teacher education. Not least of these were a number of courses organised for the

purpose of transforming "old" teachers into "new", through their adoption of socialist ideas. In 1951, the first national conference on teacher education was held. Institutions for different levels of teacher training were created for teachers' pre-service and in-service training. Steady progress took place until 1958 when "The Great Leap Forward" launched a political movement with quite unrealistic goals. Thousands of schools were set up though the teachers who were employed in them were not qualified. Things returned to normal in 1963, but by 1966 another, more terrible movement emerged.

This second period, the Cultural Revolution, lasted from 1966 to 1976. Teacher education came to a standstill and practically collapsed. Teachers were criticized as 'little bourgeois'. They were under great strain and many of them suffered considerable mental and, often, physical abuse. Many qualified teachers were prevented from teaching or were sent to the countryside to be "re-educated" by uneducated peasants. With the exception of two teachers' training colleges in Guangxi and Wuhan, all such institutions were closed. With the increase in the number of schools and school attendance, the problem of teacher shortage and quality became critical. Strange situations emerged, such as school graduates being recruited to teach students at the same level from which they themselves had just graduated. Teachers were upgraded from work in lower level schools to higher level ones, thus causing teacher training after 1976 to be problematic.

The third period post-dated the death of Mao Zedong and the arrest of the Gang of Four (Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan and Wang Hongwen), the Cultural Revolution came to an end in 1976. It was characterised by an all-round recovery and development. It began with the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in December 1978, a conference which saw Deng Xiaoping's rise to power. He introduced a number of new reforms, characterised by an "open door" policy. The emphasis shifted from a class struggle to

economic reconstruction. These reforms were to improve the education system, especially in the seriously affected areas of teacher education. The educational institutions were now required to produce adequate man power to support the country's economic development.

Provision of Teacher Education in China

The present teacher training system in China provides for: 1). training within universities (colleges or schools); 2). correspondence education, 3). broadcasting and television education, 4). self-study examination, 5). teaching and research.

The first type of training plays an important part in teacher education in China. At this, the highest level, there are Teachers Universities or Colleges. They offer a four-year first degree course which prepares students to teach in senior middle schools. Secondly, there are Junior Teachers Colleges which provide two-year certificated courses for junior middle school teachers. Entrance requirement is the successful completion of the senior middle school by the age of 19. At the third level are the Secondary Teacher Schools. These offer two- to three-year training programmes for those who wish to be primary school or kindergarten teachers. Admission requires that the successful completion of the junior middle school (usually at the age of 16). Finally, there are Education Colleges and Teachers Training Colleges which provide inservice training courses for teachers. They offer both two-year and four-year training courses; those who attend are expected to have completed the initial teacher training and to have some practical experience of teaching. Teachers Universities, Junior Teachers Colleges, and Education Colleges are all part of the higher education system. The other institutions are regarded as being part of the secondary professional training system. There are

very few places in China which train university, college or adult teachers. Where they do exist, they seem to emphasize subject training rather than teaching skills.

In addition to the courses provided by these conventional teachers' training institutions, are the other four types of courses already mentioned. Since the Northeast-China Teachers' University began to offer correspondence courses for teachers in 1953, some 60 teachers institutions of higher education are now offering such courses; some secondary teachers' schools are also doing the same. Also, since the 1960s, courses have been offered by radio and TV. Big cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai have set up television universities to provide higher education, and most of those who have been enrolled in them are secondary school teachers. A major development in this type of education, that is, occurred in the decade after the establishment of the Central Broadcasting and Television University in 1979. Yet, another type of provision is teachers' "self-study examination". As the name implies, teachers study by themselves and take national examinations at a particular time of the year. Once they have accumulated sufficient credits, they receive a certificate or degree. It is, in fact, an assessment procedure of teacher attainments rather than training. Finally, there is teaching and research. This is usually organised by "teaching and research sections" set up under education commissions at provincial, prefectural and county levels. They help teachers to understand the teaching syllabi and textbooks; and they attempt to improve their teaching methods. They carry out practical research and investigate the practice of teaching, trying to find solutions to the problems they uncover as well as organising experimental teaching. Good teaching methods are disseminated by means of their seminars and conferences.

The discussion above attempts to show that training within teachers' universities (colleges, schools) is the most important pre-inservice training offered. Correspondence, broadcasting and

television, and self-study education and training may be economically attractive, but they are not ideal. Teacher-learners mainly study by themselves. They are isolated and do not have a chance to exchange views and experiences with others. Whilst it is helpful for teachers to learn their subject content this way, they are unlikely to improve their teaching skills from reading books at home. "Teaching and research" is held to be the more popular, direct and practical type of training for teachers in post. Thus while it seems that there is a variety of training provisions for teachers, there is, in fact, only one or two kinds that are of practical value for most people.

Current Issues

Issues in Teacher Training for Adults It has already been mentioned that few places in China train university/college/adult teachers. If higher and adult education teachers do receive any training, it is likely to be about the teaching of young children. People are able to secure jobs to teach in university/college if they have higher degrees, since no provision is made for them to gain teaching skills which would enable them to become teachers first. As Jiang and Lin (1988) have identified, there are four kinds of adult educators: technicians and engineers; school teachers; people from other administrative areas; and teachers and administrators who have long engaged in vocational education. The pitfalls that adult educators face are summarized by Jiang and Lin (1988):

> "Chiefly, most practitioners lack experience in adult education; they do not have much professional background; they lack understanding of the nature, status, function, and characteristics of adult education; and they have never studied theory, psychology, or

administrative theory of adult education." (p. 110)

...let alone the practice of teaching adults. I believe these pitfalls may also apply to university/college teachers because 18 year olds are regarded as adults, and the teaching of adults is different from the teaching of children.

A survey conducted by the author of this paper has confirmed this view. Among the ten Chinese people interviewed, five were university teachers and the remaining were teaching adults in the adult sectors. One half of the sample had received training at teachers' universities to be school teachers, the rest had had no training at all. Those who had received no formal training, modelled themselves on their own school and university teachers, simply learning from their own direct experience, as they stated:

> "We repeated what we had learned. When I was a student, I knew how my teachers taught. After I graduated, I started teaching immediately. I would use the same textbooks used by my teachers when I was a student. Take the extensive reading course I taught, for example. I used the same reading material I read three years before because that was the only satisfactory material. I taught according to how I had been taught."

This blatantly suggests that the training provision for teachers in China is woefully inadequate. A complete training programme is needed to train teachers at different levels, not simply for subject knowledge, but for teaching skills. It is still unclear if the outcome of the courses available in secondary teachers' schools is effective for training teachers because the interviewees were

teachers/trainers of secondary school teachers in teachers' universities, and all they talked about was the training of secondary school teachers in their institutions. Because the same departments in central and local education commissions are responsible for teacher education, the same policy or emphasis on teachers' universities may apply to the situation in secondary teachers' schools as well.

Issues in Teacher Training for Primary and Secondary Schools Current literature shows that the demand for trained teachers is growing dramatically at the secondary levels. Research done by Lewin (1987) reveals that 70 percent of lower secondary and 40 percent of upper secondary school science teachers are said to be untrained, many having entered the teaching profession during the Cultural Revolution straight from schools. Wang and Bradbury (1993) argue that, in China, only 18 percent of geography teachers in lower secondary schools have received any higher education, and not all of those have studied geography as part of their degree programmes. In upper secondary schools, 33 percent of the geography teachers are not college trained. These are just some examples of secondary school teacher education in China.

One difference between teachers in primary schools and those in secondary schools is that, in primary schools, a single teacher has to be qualified to teach a range of subjects, whilst in secondary schools s/he usually specializes in teaching one subject only. Before becoming secondary school teachers, student teachers are in a subject department, e.g. English or Physics, and what they study is similar to that which is provided in a comprehensive university. One reason why they are called teachers' universities/colleges is that they offer courses such as Pedagogy, Psychology and subject teaching methodology. In addition, they organise teaching practice. After taking these courses, teacher students are supposed to have a good command of the basic theories concerning

teaching and learning. These courses are formal and lectures are usually provided. Students themselves get a chance to practise what they have learnt only at the last moment before they start their teaching career; the duration of this teaching practice is three months. Two months are spent in schools, one month in teaching and one month in practising to be a form teacher which includes welfare and political education of the children. Besides that, the students must do pastoral duties. They spend the rest of their time preparing their teaching and writing reports.

One major problem identified by the respondents of the survey is that courses provided for teachers in universities/colleges are more theoretical and abstract than practical, and are of little relevance. Two of their comments are given below:

> "Students don't have a chance to practise in Pedagogy and Psychology. ... Some (courses) are quite useful, but they are short of practice."

> "Courses such as Pedagogy, Psychology and teaching methodology were of little relevance. For example, teaching methodology was aimed at secondary school teaching. Teaching practice was aimed at helping students understand how secondary school teachers organized their teaching. We didn't know what to do when we were put in a real classroom. In eight weeks teaching practice, students would only teach for one week."

Teaching practice was said to be too short and textbooks were old and with few references regarding new methods. This was made clear by the British respondents:

"Many Chinese student teachers arrive in the classroom with very little actual teaching practice and little experience of classroom teaching. They have to learn 'on the job' really. They learned the old methods from their previous teachers. They never seemed to have any new methods."

A further problem is that methodology is frequently not regarded as an important course. Some of the Chinese respondents said that methodology lecturers were those who themselves could not teach other subjects very well. They may well not have had any training themselves although they were assigned to teach methodology. Others believed that good teaching was innate:

"Sometimes, people who graduate from comprehensive universities may teach better than those who graduated from teachers universities. Being a good teacher is innate. Some people are good at expressing themselves; some people still can't teach well even when they receive teacher training. I don't think teaching methodology, Pedagogy and Psychology offered in teachers institutions are sufficiently practical. Much is too theoretical. I don't think the one month teaching practice in my college was very helpful. Some of the students go back to their home school to do the teaching practice and receive little supervision."

"The teaching of methodology is weak in China. It is not regarded as important. Those who can not teach other subjects seem to be asked to teach methodology. This is wrong idea... and it is a kind of prejudice. Trainers should discard traditional and wrong ideas, only then can we train good students."

The reader may ask why this is so. In addition to the issues mentioned above, we have to examine the system itself. First, there is a mismatch between the expected level of work done in teachers' universities and that done in colleges. In his book "Higher Education", Tian (1990) highlights two contrasting views about this. Some regard teachers' universities and colleges as institutions of academic research. Their students are judged on the quality of their academic work. Others argue that teachers' universities set out to train teachers. Their prime purpose is the professional preparation of teachers and not one of academic research. Even though these two contrasting opinions are held by Chinese educators, it is the first that dominates government policy. This point was also identified by the British respondents:

> "Teachers University are basically teaching institutions, not serious, highly academic institutions. In fact, lots of work which is going on in these places is more similar to the work of a college of education in the UK rather than the work of a top university. There is a problem whether the place is really an academic institution or whether it's a teaching institution. Is it really there for research, or is it really there for training student-teachers? The majority of the students won't continue to work in universities or to study. They'll go to middle schools in the countryside, where the most important skill they'll need is their ability to teach rather than their academic study."

Secondly, the political and social status of teachers is low in China today. People do not have much of an incentive to take up a teaching career. Historically teachers were held in high esteem, not least because they helped people climb to the top of the ladder and obtain official positions

through the Civil Service Examinations. Teachers were paid by the government and some government officials were formerly teachers, but promoted to their present positions. But circumstances have changed. There are many jobs and career avenues which do not depend upon the influence of teachers. Compared with other professions, such as engineering, administration and economics, teaching is poorly paid. Teaching is seen as a job with little real power. The teacher is someone you respect for his/her intellect, but they are really rather poor, shabby people, who do not have much status in society. Research done by Han et al. (1984) in secondary schools in Dalian suggests that teaching is still an unpopular choice of occupation. Only 2.8 percent of their sample selected teaching when asked about their career aspirations, while others selected to be engineers, doctors, workers, etc. This social phenomenon therefore hinders able people from going into teaching. This was made clear in the following statement by one of the interview respondents:

> "They don't want to learn the technique of being a good teacher because they don't really want to be a teacher. There is no incentive to learn to teach."

The China Daily (April 19, 1993) reported the fact that in 1991 the income of Chinese people in 12 major professions, on average, increased by 9.35 percent over the previous years, but teachers' income grew by only 5.95 percent. Since 1992, teachers, especially those in primary schools and high schools in rural areas, have been giving up their profession to go in search of more lucrative careers. In Hunan Province, about 2 per cent of the teachers have reportedly switched to other jobs, a most unusually circumstance in China. Most of them are young or middle-aged and of high professional standing. The shift is threatening the country's goal of popularization of its nine-year

compulsory education by the turn of the century.

This issue was also addressed by Li Lanqing, Vice-Premier at different occasions. In celebrating the Ninth Teachers' Day on September 10, 1993, he pointed out that treatment of teachers has been less than desirable. Some practical problems still exist in teachers' living and working conditions. Some regions have even delayed paying teachers (China Daily, Sept. 10, 1993). At a State Council meeting on July 16, 1998, Vice-Premier Li also stated that faculty and staff members' housing is a big problem in universities. Due to shortage of housing, some teachers have to delay their wedding and some others cannot live together with their wives/husbands after their wedding. Most young teachers' single-room apartments do not have private washrooms or kitchens. Some are even in dangerous conditions [People's Daily(Overseas Edition), July 16, 1998, p1]. How could teachers wholly devote themselves to teaching when they still have so many worries and are not paid on time no matter how much they should actually get?

Thirdly, there is little reward for success in teaching. In teachers' universities, emphasis is on academic work rather than on teaching ability. People get promoted via their academic success. Old teachers stick to old methods which they have been using for years, preferring to spend their time on academic work. A few respondents stated that many teachers are not motivated to put much of their efforts into teaching. This is summed up in the following:

> "It would have been very helpful if I had taken it serious. The problem was that the teachers didn't have the incentive to learn although the trainers hoped the trainees would teach more efficiently after training. Young teachers were not interested in teaching skills. They participated for the purpose of practising their oral English, to develop their writing and

appreciation skills so that they could pass the entrance examination for postgraduate programmes or to go abroad. Purposes were crossed. I got the impression that nobody in the course was specially enthusiastic about it because young teachers didn't see teaching as a way of getting promoted." (Chinese respondent)

"Once the students are in university, the work they do has little relation to what they will do in the future. There is little relation to the chances of getting a good job. If they want to get a good job, they will get it by connections, so their work is not that important. Those who have no connections know that even though they may work very hard, the chances of getting a good job are slim. There is little reward for success in education." (English respondent)

Recommendations

The inescapable conclusion is that the teacher training system in China is not altogether satisfactory and calls for urgent, remedial action. For this reason, the following suggestions are made in the hope that they may help to effect change in the system in China.

1. A complete and more thorough teacher training system should be implemented in China to train qualified teachers not only for teaching in primary and middle schools, but in other educational institutions as well.

2. Emphasis should be placed on teaching in subject specialization, and special attention should be given to training in teaching skills.

3. Reorganization of courses in Pedagogy, Psychology and Methodology is imperative in order to wed theory with practice. New teaching methods, including micro-teaching, should be attempted.

4. Teaching practice should be extended, occurring more than once during the training period so that students may spend more time in the classroom before they start their full time teaching.

5. The roles of teachers' universities/colleges should be subjected to public debate in the hope that helpful suggestions might be implemented.

6. Teachers, especially those of methodology, should be sent abroad to see how teachers are trained and what methods are used. By this means a different perspective, and useful techniques could be gleaned and tried in respective areas of China.

7. Measures should be taken to make it unnecessary for teachers to shift to other jobs.

8. Most important of all is the need to improve the teaching and living conditions of teachers. 'The Essentials of China's Educational Reform and Development', the reform programme which sets the goals of education development in the 1990s, pledges to increase teachers' income to a level higher than that of the average of employees of State-run enterprises and governmental institutions, and further to strengthen teacher education and training (China Daily, Feb. 27, 1993). But similar promises have been made before and were not implemented. It is hoped that this time the Government means what it says.

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